



HELPFILE

PUT YOUR QUESTIONS TO OUR TECHNICAL EXPERTS

Contents

HELPFILE

Paul Mullen answers your computing queries

How do I copy my vinyl LPs to CD? 242

Can XP run my old scanner? 242

Factfile: New spyware adopts rootkits 243

Newly installed DVD writer won't burn DVDs 243

Outlook Express keeps sending the same message 244

Feedback: Fixing Firefox HTML problems 245

How do I get rid of this Trojan? 245

Why does my PC keep freezing? 245

Synchronising files between laptop and desktop PCs 246

Can I use two different memory chips together? 246

How can I get rid of Panda AntiVirus? 247

Adding visitor comments to a website 247

IVAN IWANNADO 249

Ivan saves energy

NIGEL KNOWITALL 250

Getting rid of hyperlinks in Excel • Creating a split window view in Microsoft Project • Removing the recently used file list in Word • Using triggers in PowerPoint

BUYING CLINIC 252

How do I use two monitors at once? • Napster or iTunes Music Store? • Which graphics card do I need? • Can I use HDMI? • What's the difference between DLP and LCD?

CONTACTING HELPFILE

EMAIL PAUL MULLEN AT:
helpfile@computershopper.co.uk

WRITE TO:

Helpfile,
Computer Shopper,
30 Cleveland Street,
London W1T 4JD

When writing to Helpfile, please try to give full details of your problem. We also require both daytime and evening phone numbers in case we need more information. Although the policy of Computer Shopper is not to publish readers' email addresses, we include them in Helpfile so that other readers with experience of similar problems can share their solution (please also cc any comments to helpfile@computershopper.co.uk). If you would prefer not to have your email address published, please say so.

PAUL MULLEN

Paul has been a transport demand forecaster, economic adviser to the government and IT consultant to many big companies, and has been using and writing software for personal computers since 1978

helpfile@computershopper.co.uk

MUSIC COPYING LP RECORDS

HOW DO I COPY MY VINYL LPs TO CD?

Q I want to copy LP records to CD, but I know nothing about hooking up my stereo to the PC. My stereo is at the other end of the house, so is it possible to move just my turntable from the rest of my hi-fi equipment and hook it up to the PC?

Norman Percival, bluemoon43@tiscali.co.uk

A It is possible to connect just your turntable to the PC, but it's much easier if the PC and hi-fi are near each other and you can connect the amp's phono output to your sound card's line-in socket. Unless you have one of those fancy front panels on your PC that is equipped with phono connectors, you'll need a phono-to-3.5mm jack cable. You'll also need some audio-editing software, such as CoolEdit or the free Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>).

If you do have to leave your hi-fi and PC apart, you can still achieve your ends. Your turntable might include its own amp but, if not, you'll need a pre-amp to convert its output into a suitable signal. Much depends on the kind of turntable that you have, as different turntables use different types of cartridge. The more expensive moving coil cartridges need more amplification than moving magnet

cartridges. It is likely that your turntable outputs won't match your computer sound card's input needs. You may end up with extremely low volume or, at best, muffled bass. If you connect a magnetic cartridge, you'll probably find that you get massive amounts of hum.

Turntable cartridges are likely to produce an output of 3mV at 50k ohm, while your sound card needs a signal of around 1.5V at 600 ohms.

To connect your turntable to the computer properly, you need a phono pre-amp. Apart from matching impedance and boosting the volume, the pre-amp is needed to provide RIAA equalisation.

When a record is made, the bass sounds are reduced, or 'attenuated', otherwise they wouldn't fit in the grooves. The treble sounds are boosted to overcome the background hiss on old 78s. This is done using the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) specification called the RIAA response curve. Upon playback, the phono pre-amp reverses this process, boosting the bass sounds and attenuating the treble sounds precisely. The ART DeeJay Pre2 pre-amp costs £35 including VAT from www.dolphinmusic.co.uk.

◀ A phono pre-amp will provide the best possible sound quality when transferring vinyl to your PC



SCANNERS MISSING DRIVERS

CAN XP RUN MY OLD SCANNER?

Q I purchased a Plustek OpticPro 9636T scanner that is compatible with Windows 95, 98, NT and 2000, but not with my Windows XP Home SP2 PC. I remember reading somewhere that it is possible to make Windows XP behave like an earlier version of Windows. Would that help?

E3 Bill, e3.bill@gmail.com

A You recall correctly, but that compatibility mode is only for running applications. You can tell Windows XP that, when you run a certain application, you want it to behave like an older version of Windows. It

then 'wraps' the application in a layer of software that emulates the previous version of Windows.

This doesn't apply to low-level hardware access. Your scanner attaches to the parallel printer port and needs a driver to access the printer port directly. Windows XP doesn't allow such direct access to the hardware, except through special, low-level hardware drivers called virtual device drivers (vxd).

Incidentally, there's no driver for Windows 2000. If it existed, it would probably work with XP. The driver works with Windows 95, 98 and Me. For XP, stick to USB scanners and check that drivers are available before buying a used scanner.



FACTFILE

NEW SPYWARE ADOPTS ROOTKITS

Rootkits give hackers a backdoor into your system, and make it harder for you to detect viruses or spyware. Here we explain what you can do to protect your computer from this new threat

Rootkits have been attracting a lot of attention recently. This is in no small part due to Sony BMG Music's use of a stealthy, low-level tool in a scheme to prevent people copying music CDs (see *Newsfile*, page 270). The potential use of rootkits have long been known to spyware authors, and this month we were alarmed to find, for the first time, their use by a spyware application in the wild.

The concept behind the rootkit is similar to that of stealth viruses such as Dark Avenger, released back in 1988, which affected DOS. Once the virus code loads into memory, it intercepts various operating system calls and filters their results to hide its files and Registry entries. When you open Windows Explorer and look at your Windows\System32 folder, or when an anti-spyware program scans your computer, the rootkit hides entries for its files. When you open RegEdit, or use any spyware scanner that scans the Registry, the Registry entries that load the spyware do not appear.

The piece of spyware we found called itself SpySheriff, but such software changes its name frequently. We call it blackmail-ware; rogue anti-spyware software that installs spyware on your computer and then asks you for money to remove it. This one reported infections that didn't actually exist, though others may report genuine infections. These generally do a worse job of removing spyware than free anti-spyware programs. Spyware such as this often gets on to your computer through a pop-up

advert, which scares you with a warning that your computer is infected, even though it hasn't scanned it. It then suggests you download its software to scan your computer.

In the case of SpySheriff, the software had been distributed through the LimeWire file-sharing service, claiming to be an updated version of the LimeWire software. File-sharing users should never download executable files, as there's no way of knowing where they really originate. Several prominent viruses distribute themselves through the shared file folders of infected computers, and file-sharing networks are a very good way to distribute a new virus or spyware rapidly before anti-virus signature files have been updated to include it.

By using rootkits, viruses can hide from anti-virus or anti-spyware scans unless you run the scans in Safe Mode, because the commonly available rootkits do not run in Safe Mode.

With SpySheriff the problem was so new, having been distributed via LimeWire just two days earlier, that while we tried every available anti-virus and anti-spyware scanner we could, nothing detected the infected files even in Safe Mode.

Fortunately SysInternals (www.sysinternals.com) has produced a great Rootkit Reveal, which looks at raw hard disk sectors and raw

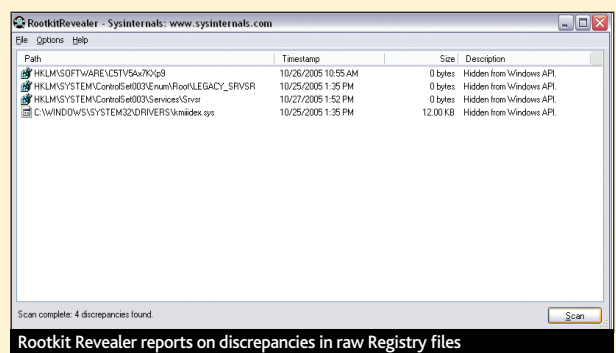
Registry files to find discrepancies between what Windows' system calls report and their actual contents. It also reports hidden alternative data streams (ADS) used by some spyware programs. Kaspersky users should be warned that it is one of the very few applications to use ADS and it creates thousands of ADS files that Rootkit Reveal duly reports.

The lesson is if you have spyware that just won't go away, even when your PC appears to be clean, you need to run Rootkit Reveal.

SYSTEM STOPPED

System has been stopped due to a serious malfunction.
Spyware activity has been detected.
It is recommended to use spyware removal tool to prevent data loss.
Do not use the computer before all spyware removed.

Rootkits such as SpySheriff can be hard to budge



DVD-RW OEM DRIVES

NEWLY INSTALLED DVD WRITER WON'T BURN DVDs

Q I bought a DVD writer that was recently reviewed in *Computer Shopper* – namely the LG GSA-4163B – though actually I bought a slightly different model, the LG-4163BAL, by mistake. The issue is that, although I can read all formats, I cannot write anything to a disc.

My computer does not recognise the drive as a writable one, only as a DVD-ROM drive. I have changed the slave and master settings with no luck. I notice from the owner's manual that the system requirements are for a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 or higher with 512MB of memory. I have a Dell Dimension 4400, 1.8GHz Pentium 4 processor with 768MB of memory. I can only assume that my 1.8GHz processor is the problem. I would have thought that although my computer isn't the fastest, it could easily cope with a new DVD writer because it is by no means a poorly rated machine.

If this is the case, why do DVD writer drives not display this information more prominently?

And why are new DVD drives so hungry for processing power? Is my faster DVD drive a DVD-ROM-only affair now? I frequently copy digital photos to discs and desperately need this new faster drive because my current Samsung DVD-RW combo drive is so slow. Should I install a 2.4GHz processor?

Stephen Fraser, stephen@stephenfraser2.wanadoo.co.uk

A It's not likely to be the speed of your processor causing the problem. That might lead to 'under-run' errors while burning discs, but not a total inability to burn DVDs.

We are guessing you bought a bare drive that did not include any software. To burn DVDs, you need additional software such as Nero or Roxio Easy Media Creator. Usually a drive will come bundled with a basic version of one of these programs, but drives that were intended to be sold in bulk to computer system builders (often called OEMs within the trade) are usually shipped without software. If this is the case, you need to buy a disc-

burning program. Perhaps the company that sold you the drive can provide one, or possibly the one you've used with the Samsung drive will work.



▲ New DVD writers require fast processors and lots of memory, but they should still work even if your PC doesn't quite match the minimum requirements



EMAIL CORRUPT FOLDERS

OUTLOOK EXPRESS KEEPS SENDING THE SAME MESSAGE

Q My PC has an annoying fault. When sending an email I get an error message, but it provides no useful detail. The email remains in my Outbox but has been sent. I have my automatic Send/Receive set at five minutes, so unless I remember to delete the message from my Outbox the recipient will get a dozen copies every hour. Luckily, Norton AntiVirus scans my outgoing email and I am using the scan display to check that emails have been sent successfully.

The problem developed after upgrading the speed of our BT Broadband connection and installing a new modem/router. It was intermittent at first, but now affects every email I send. The other two systems on my network don't have the fault. I have tried creating a new email account, and also tried setting both my other two email addresses as the default. Incoming mail uses our own domain name and outgoing mail uses *smtp.btconnect.com*.

Norton AntiVirus is up to date, and although I receive a small amount of spam none of it has attachments. However, the nature of my business means that most legitimate emails I receive do contain attachments. I tried disabling Norton's scanning of outgoing mail. Instead of getting the error message immediately the email starts to be sent I now get the error message just as it is finishing.

Rick Glover, *rick@impartad.co.uk*

A Whenever there is a problem with sending email, the first thing to try is to change the options in your anti-virus software to disable scanning outgoing mail. You should always scan incoming mail. Most viruses that send out emails try to bypass anti-virus programs, so won't lose much security. Often the delay caused by virus-scanning large attachments causes the email send operation to time out.

Problems with anti-virus scanners prevent mail being sent at all. Where mail is sent repeatedly, the problem is not with the mail send operation; a data storage problem is preventing your email client marking the mail as sent successfully. We have seen this happen with Outlook Express when the Sent Items folder was damaged. Try creating a new folder called Sent Old and move all your sent mail into it. Return to the Sent Items folder, which should now be empty, and choose File, Folder, Compact.

If that does not work, exit Outlook Express and locate the folder where your mail is stored. It will be under Documents and Settings/username/Identities. Rename the file Sent Items.dbx. On restarting Outlook Express, it should create a new folder for Sent Items. See if this fixes the problem.

If you send lots of large attachments, there may be a problem with the size of your Sent Mail folder. Outlook Express has a maximum file size of 2GB, but does not warn you when you approach or exceed this limit. We have also seen problems when the folders get large but still well below this limit. The larger the folder, the more likely it is to become corrupted. We advise you to split up mail folders to keep DBX file sizes below 300MB. Unfortunately, Microsoft makes it hard to see just how large the folders are. Outlook Express tells you the number of messages in the folder but not the size of the database file holding them. The mail folder files are tucked away inside a hidden folder.

The easiest way to see the size of each folder is to click on Start then Search. Click All Files and Folders then enter *.dbx in the filename field. Under More Advanced Options, check Search Hidden Files and Folders before you click Search. This should find all Outlook Express mail folder files on your hard disk and display file information, including the file sizes. If it just displays icons, select View and Details.

Another way to view the size of files – and the way Microsoft recommends you back up your email – is to Click on Tools, Options then choose the Maintenance tab and click the Store Folder button.

This will show a window with the current location of your message folders. Select the entire path name and press Ctrl-C to copy it to the clipboard. Make sure you get all of it, starting with the drive letter and ending with Outlook Express. Then click Start, Run and press Ctrl-V, which pastes the path name into the Run command line. Click OK, and a window will open displaying the message files.

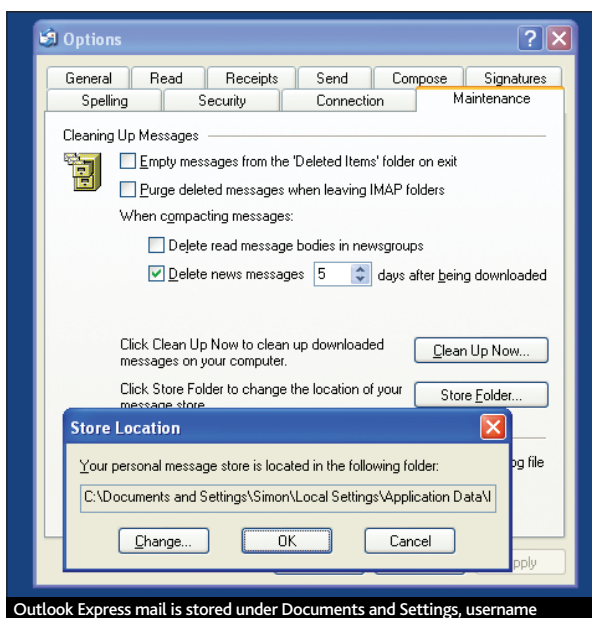
Because of the strange location of Outlook Express' folder, which is muddled in with temporary files, many backup programs fail to back up email. To make a backup copy of this folder, click on Edit, Select All, Edit again then Copy to Folder. Choose a suitable location then click Make New Folder and type in a suitable name such as Email Backup. Highlight that folder and click Copy.

ADVANCED EMAIL BACKUP

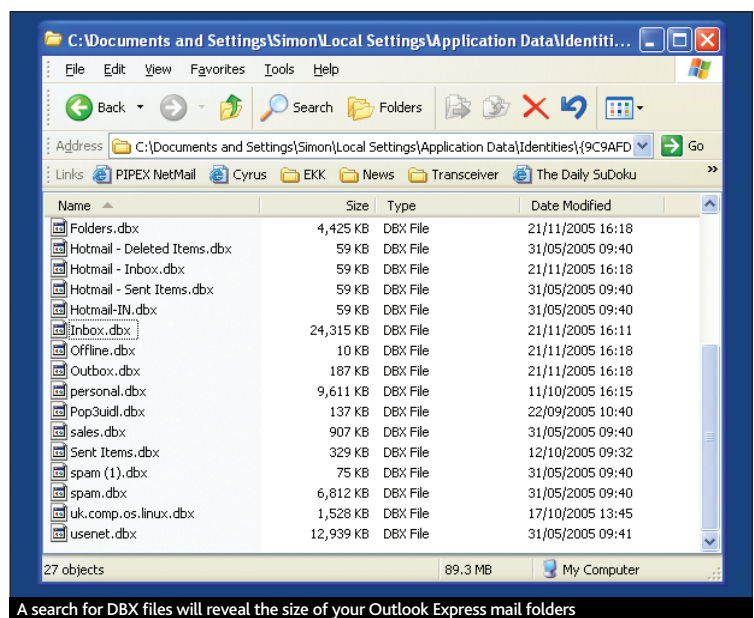
You can also create a batch file that will back up your email with a single click. Start as above, copying the long folder path name. Then right-click on the Desktop, choose New, Text Document and rename it Email Backup.bat. Click Yes if it warns you about changing the file extension. Right-click on that file and choose Edit. Notepad will open.

In Notepad, type `cd "` (with one space after `cd`) and press Ctrl-V. This should paste the name and path of the folder. Add a closing quote mark (`"`) to the end of the line and press Enter. On the next line type: `Xcopy . "C:\Email Backup"` with a space, period and another space before the destination folder name. Press enter again, type `Pause` and then save your file. The finished file (shown below) will back up your email when double-clicked:

```
cd "C:\Documents and Settings\owner\
Local Settings\Application ,Data\
Identities\{C48F8622-CEC5-49B4-A877-
F411CE30018F}\Microsoft\Outlook
Express"
Xcopy . "C:\Email Backup"
Pause
```



Outlook Express mail is stored under Documents and Settings, username



A search for DBX files will reveal the size of your Outlook Express mail folders



FEEDBACK FIREFOX

FIXING FIREFOX HTML PROBLEMS



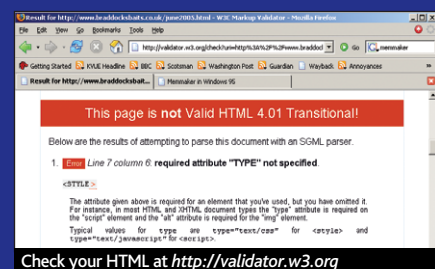
Congratulations on your answer to John Kinsman (*Helpfile*, *Shopper* November 2005), who was complaining of problems displaying www.braddocksbaits.co.uk/june2005.html using Firefox and Windows.

I wonder if enough website owners are aware of the excellent free HTML/XHTML validation service provided by the World Wide Web Consortium at <http://validator.w3.org>? The page John had trouble with, for example, is not valid HTML, lacks encoding and has 11 identifiable errors.

The validator helps you fix your HTML code, and I've yet to find a page composed of properly validated HTML that caused any problems in Firefox. A really useful free service that can save everyone a heap of trouble.

Fergus Wilde, fwilde@chethams.org.uk

A Thanks for your comment. Firefox displays valid web pages accurately, unlike Internet Explorer. The problem is that websites may adjust their code to work round IE bugs, or may have errors in their pages that IE ignores. The W3 HTML validator is a great validation tool.



While we are talking about web page validation, webmasters need to make sure that their pages are accessible to blind or other disabled users. The University of Texas website has a great collection of resources at www.utexas.edu/learn/accessibility/testing.html.

TROJAN FALSE POSITIVE

HOW DO I GET RID OF THIS TROJAN?

Q I run Windows XP with Service Pack 2. My ISP is AOL and I use McAfee VirusScan and McAfee Personal Firewall Plus. Having read your magazine, I installed and ran Ad-Aware SE Personal, Spybot Search & Destroy, Ultra WinCleaner and Spyware Doctor. I scan for viruses, spyware and Trojans at least once a week and, until recently, had not had anything that I couldn't remove.

Yesterday, however, Spyware Doctor picked up a Trojan called Trojan.Proxy.GN, which it described as a serious threat. I asked Spyware Doctor to remove it and it reported a problem and told me that the system was shutting down because "the DCOM Server Process Launcher service terminated unexpectedly".

When I rebooted and ran Spyware Doctor again, the Trojan was still there. None of the other products picked up this Trojan. I read the letter from John Brown in *Helpfile*, *Shopper* November 2005 and downloaded the free Trend online scanner and F-Secure's online scanner. I ran these in Safe Mode. Again, no Trojans or viruses were identified. I also downloaded Ewido

spyware and Trojan detection program, and ran this in normal and Safe modes. Once again, nothing was reported.

Does my PC have an infection, or is Spyware Doctor confused? If it is a real Trojan, it appears that it's linked itself with a critical part of some Microsoft code required to run my PC, so how do I get rid of it?

Nigel Ford, Nandjford@aol.com

A This is a very tricky question. There are so many different spyware variants, and each one installs so many components that it is common for one spyware product to identify something that other programs miss. Even the very best spyware remover, which is probably Webroot's Spy Sweeper, finds only about 90 to 95 per cent of spyware. Spyware Doctor used to be among the top anti-spyware programs, but recent reviews have rated it below the current leaders. It is certainly possible, however, that it is picking up something other programs have missed.

However, false positives are always a possibility. As there are more and more spyware

signatures to look for, there is an increased chance that an innocent program will contain a pattern of bytes that matches a spyware signature. I've been told by Spyware Doctor users that more recent signature updates do not detect this file as infected. According to Spyware Doctor's description, Trojan.Proxy.GN opens a TCP port and alters the hosts file to block many anti-virus sites. Your hosts file is located in Windows\System32\Drivers\Etc and can be opened with Notepad. If you do have this Trojan, your hosts file will contain lots of lines that each start with IP address 127.0.0.1 followed by the name of an anti-virus site. Such an entry will prevent you accessing that site.

Certain anti-spyware programs such as Spybot Search & Destroy add lots of entries to the hosts file. However, these list known spyware sites. Ad-blocking software may do the same, listing ad-server sites such as www.doubleclick.net.

You can also try the free Kaspersky online scanner at www.kaspersky.com/virussscanner. This comprehensive database lists many little-known viruses and Trojans that other programs miss. If this reports your system is clean, it probably is.

DISK ERROR CORRUPTION

WHY DOES MY PC KEEP FREEZING?

Q I have an 800MHz Pentium III PC with 512MB of memory. I have been having a few problems lately, where the PC has been freezing regularly, about every 15 minutes. I would like to know what might be causing that.

In addition, this week my PC shut down, and is telling me a disk error has occurred and that I should press Ctrl-Alt-Del to restart. However, when I do so, nothing happens and it goes back to the same message and tells me to repeat the action. What could be the cause of that?

Dany Charles, charlesdw@hotmail.com

A There are many possible causes of your problem. We would be most concerned with the possibility of hard disk errors, as all your data could be lost. You should start by making a copy of the hard disk. Once you have a complete copy of all the data, you can run disk diagnostic programs; most hard disk makers provide these. Running disk diagnostics on a failing drive might make it fail completely, so it's best not to run them before copying off the data if you can.

If the hard disk is OK, you need to isolate whether this is a hardware or software problem. Do this by booting from something that does not depend on Windows. A diagnostics CD or even a

Linux CD will do the job. If your PC manufacturer provides diagnostics software then run this, paying close attention to memory tests. Try reinstalling Windows to a new directory. Provided you use a new directory this won't overwrite your existing installation, although it may overwrite Programs such as Internet Explorer if your installation CD does not have the same service pack.

Once you are sure there is no problem with the hardware, you can try to isolate a Windows problem. Nowadays this usually means spyware. Use msconfig to turn off inessential services and start-up programs. Finally, if you have a Windows XP CD, try a repair install of Windows.



MULTIPLE PCS SYNCHRONISATION

SYNCHRONISING FILES BETWEEN LAPTOP AND DESKTOP PCs

Q Are you aware of any software that can reconcile the Microsoft Word, Excel, Project and Outlook files on my laptop with the files on my desktop?

I use Windows XP on both machines. I want to keep the latest files on my Freecom FHD-2 Pro 20GB external hard disk and synchronise them with the PC that I am working on using a USB connection. This would sort out the vast discrepancy that currently exists between the different machines.

I constantly work on documents and spreadsheets on both computers at different times and locations, and need both to hold the latest version of every file. Windows did have Briefcase, but this was a little primitive and I don't think it did precisely what I need. My BlackBerry 7100v does this with contact addresses between my phone and the PC, but I need a similar facility for PC to PC.

Anthony Murray, info@anthonymurray.com

A Windows XP Professional has a file synchronise function called Offline Files that will do what you want. Look in the Start menu under Programs, Accessories, Synchronize. First turn on Offline Files then specify any folders on the network that you want to synchronise and choose 'Make available offline' from the File menu. Windows XP will synchronise these folders automatically whenever you start the computer and it finds a connection.

Both Windows XP Home and Professional editions have an updated version of Briefcase. When you create a new Briefcase by going to the File menu and choosing Briefcase from the New option, the system creates copies of the files with which you want to work, plus links to the location of the original files. This Briefcase can then be

moved to a laptop computer or to removable media such as an external hard disk.

It is important that on the laptop computer you work only with the files in the Briefcase. If you copy them to the Desktop and work on them there, the Briefcase will not be updated properly. When you return home you can return the Briefcase back to the office computer and select Update All, and the original versions of any changed files will be updated. The Briefcase is handy for use with a USB flash drive.

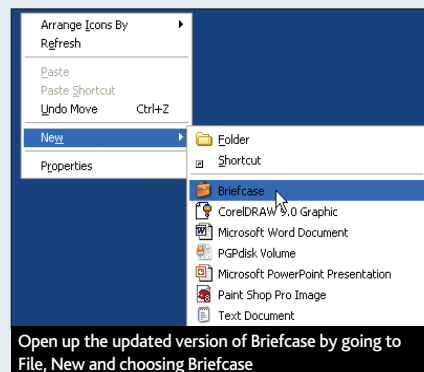
Alternatively, there are several commercial products that will help. We use one called Fileback-PC from www.fileback-pc.com. Another possibility is Folder Clone, from www.folderclone.com. Both offer more flexible scheduling options and have less impact on other running applications than the built-in Synchronize program, which tends to hog the computer's resources until it is finished. Both these applications are available in free trial versions, so you can find one that suits your method of working.

Bear in mind that all these programs are file synchronisation tools; none will reconcile

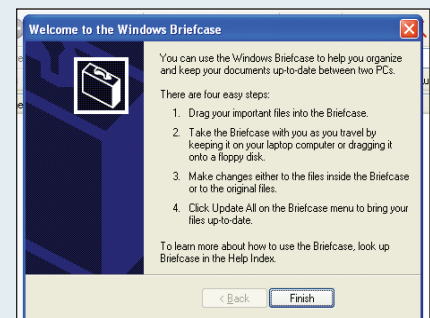
differences between two versions of a complex file such as an Outlook PST or QuickBooks database. They simply use the version with the latest modified date. Unless you are very careful always to synchronise before accessing email with the other computer, this may not be what you want.

You could work around this by changing the advanced mail settings under Options, Accounts to 'Leave a copy of messages on the server' for a few days. That way, you can download new messages to both computers and each will keep track of the messages it has already downloaded. The downside is that you have to delete spam from both systems.

As you mention, your BlackBerry can synchronise your Outlook (though not Outlook Express) address book with its own address book. By synchronising your BlackBerry with both PCs, you can ensure that all three address books contain the same entries. If you always send yourself a blind CC (bcc) copy of each message you send, the two databases will stay in step.



Open up the updated version of Briefcase by going to File, New and choosing Briefcase



The Windows Briefcase makes it easy to synchronise files between computers

MEMORY DDR AND SDRAM

CAN I USE TWO DIFFERENT MEMORY CHIPS TOGETHER?

Q By a strange quirk of fate, I have recently acquired two different types of RAM modules: one 512MB DDR PC2100 module and two 256MB SDRAM PC1300 modules.

My home computer will work OK using either type of module, but it will not use both types at the same time. As it would be a shame to waste the SDRAM modules, do you know if there is any way I can use them so that both types work together, giving my system 1GB of RAM? My motherboard is a Jetway V266B -V.3, using an AMD Duron 1.3GHz processor.

Alternatively, if I were to upgrade my processor with a newer model, which chip would be best suited to my system board – or would it be just as cheap to replace the motherboard and chip altogether?

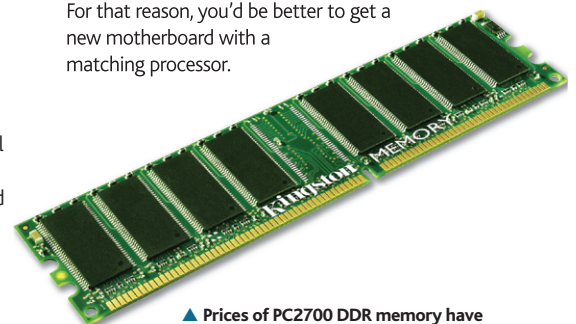
Barry Appleby, BAAppleby@ucsm.ac.uk

A We have not heard of PC1300 RAM, though there was a bug in some versions of CPU-Z (www.cpuid.org/cpuz.php) that erroneously reported PC133 memory as PC1300. Although your motherboard is equipped with slots for both SDRAM and DDR DIMM memory, you can't use both kinds of memory together. We have never come across a board that did allow this, presumably because it would create too many timing difficulties.

While DDR prices have continued to fall, PC133 memory has become very expensive. Crucial UK will sell you a 512MB PC2700 DDR module for £39, but 256MB PC133 modules cost £40 each and a 512MB module will set you back £90. So you should be able to sell your unwanted SDRAM modules for more than the cost of a DDR module. Jetway's website at www.jetway.com.tw has a CPU support chart that lists the processors your motherboard supports. This will depend on the

board revision BOM number, which is found on a yellow label. See the website for details.

The fastest option would probably not be all that much faster than your present processor, and you would have to be careful to get one of the revisions compatible with the board. For that reason, you'd be better to get a new motherboard with a matching processor.



▲ Prices of PC2700 DDR memory have continued to fall. A 512MB module will set you back around £39



ANTI-VIRUS REMOVAL

HOW CAN I GET RID OF PANDA ANTIVIRUS?

Q As someone who has had the misfortune of installing the trial version of Panda Platinum Antivirus, I'm now paying the price big time.

The software works quite well, but if you try and uninstall it during the trial period the consequences are worse than any virus I've come across. If you do try to uninstall it, access to the internet is halted. Despite help from my ISP, this problem has only been resolved by reinstalling Panda's software. I was quite impressed with it to start with, but I wouldn't have it now if they were giving it away.

I can't uninstall the Panda software now and get an error message that says: "Error extracting support files: the system cannot find the file specified." I've used Norton SystemWorks to correct as many problems as I can, and some Panda files that proved most stubborn were eradicated with the help of the MoveOnBoot freeware I downloaded.

But despite my best efforts, Panda Antivirus lingers in the system. I'm worried about the Panda services that are showing as stopped yet loiter in the System Configuration Services, such as Anti-spam, Firewall, Function, Pavkre, Pavrot, Process Protection, Anti-virus, Preventium+ Server and IManager.

When I open Outlook I get the message: "The add-in 'C:\Program Files\Panda Software\Panda Platinum 2005 Internet...' could not be installed or loaded." Clicking on the message twice makes it disappear, and Outlook then seems to work at its normal speed.

I've had no response from Panda Software, despite trying two different contact addresses.
James Murrant, james@murrant.co.uk

A Looking at the number of similar questions to yours, it seems that this has been a common problem for users of Panda Platinum or Titanium Antivirus. Something corrupts the Panda installation and the uninstall then fails because of a missing DLL file.

Normally you could fix this by doing a reinstall of the same program, but the Panda installer stops as soon as it detects that Panda is already installed on the system, telling you that you must uninstall the old version first.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Panda has borrowed techniques from spyware writers, using additional processes to check for unauthorised attempts to remove or disable Panda anti-virus protection, and then reinstalling the deleted components.

Even when the uninstaller works it is incomplete, leaving behind several components. Unfortunately, this is all too typical – uninstallers are often the buggiest part of a program. This problem is not unique to Panda; Symantec's Norton AntiVirus has long been plagued by uninstall problems. Symantec's solution is to supply a set of special removal tools on its website. Panda doesn't, though, and you will have to resort to a manual uninstall. Because of Panda's special reinstalling tricks this is not going to be complete and should be attempted only when other methods fail.

First, you'll need to restart the computer in Safe Mode because files can be deleted only when they are not running. To do this, press F8 repeatedly during the startup process, before the first Windows screen appears. Choose Safe Mode or Safe Mode with Networking from the menu that appears.

There may still be one entry running in the list of processes. Panda has used a Windows Registry key called Applnit_DLLs to load Pavwait.dll. This key is only used by spyware, viruses and a few security programs because it loads a DLL file as an extension to the User32.dll file, one of the core components of Windows. This will even load in Safe Mode, before any other application modules.

Once you have restarted in Safe Mode, run HijackThis! (www.spywareinfo.com/~merijn) and remove all references, particularly in Services (section 023), that relate to Panda. If present, remove the Applnit_DLLs line, too. You should then be able to delete most of the remaining files in the C:\Program Files\Panda Software directory. You

should also locate and delete PAV.SIG, APVXD.VXD, APVXDUT.VXD and panda.CHP from your Windows System or System32 folder.

Next, you'll want to search for and delete Panda entries from the Registry. I suggest you create a System Restore Point first. Click on Start, Run, type regedit and click OK. Highlight My Computer at the top of the list then press Ctrl-F to bring up the search window. Search for Panda first. When it brings up a folder or file, press the Delete key to remove it. If you find any mention of Panda as an InProcServer32 or similar entry under the HKey_Clases_Root/CLSID section, you need to press Tab to switch back to the left window then go back up to the parent class-id (a long hexadecimal string) and delete the whole class-id. Press F3 to find the next Panda entry.

Continue to search and delete the Registry entries until no more entries are found. Then repeat this process, this time searching for pav. When both searches are complete, close the Registry and restart the computer.

If you still have a problem with Microsoft Outlook, you can remove Panda's add-in using the Add-In Manager. The exact menu option varies according to which version you use, but try Tools, Options, Other, Advanced Options, COM Add-Ins, Add-In Manager.

If any internet security program gets corrupted and has to be removed manually, there is a danger you won't be able to access the internet. In most cases, this is because one of the components removed formed part of the layered service provider (LSP) chain. All TCP/IP internet traffic goes through this chain of modules, and if the chain is broken you can't communicate with the internet. The same happens when you remove spyware or a virus that uses LSP.

To fix the problem in Windows XP, download Winsock XP Fix, which can be found on many sites such as www.majorgeeks.com/download4372.html. Unless you have access to another computer, it would be a good idea to download this program before you start removing stuff.

WEB DESIGN ADDING FORUMS

ADDING VISITOR COMMENTS TO A WEBSITE

Q We have a local community website at www.llanellyhilltara.co.uk. We used Microsoft Word to make up the pages and uploaded the data to the site using Smart FTP. Our problem is that we would like to add a comments page, where people viewing the site can add remarks that other visitors can view. Preferably this would happen without our intervention.

David Higham, zen81551@zen.co.uk

A To start with, you need to see what your web-hosting service will support. Even a simple Guestbook needs some programming. Common Gateway Interface (CGI)

provides a way to connect a programming language to your website. Some servers will allow you to upload any programs you want to a special CGI folder on your site, while others limit you to running programs pre-installed by the hosting company. The programming languages available will depend on whether the website is running on a UNIX-, Linux- or Windows-based system. If you want to use Microsoft FrontPage extensions, such as the 'webbot' used to create a guestbook, you need a server that runs FrontPage extensions.

It looks like your site is hosted by Zen Internet. Its Linux-based systems support CGI, and there are lots of free guestbook systems written in Perl that you could use. Just remember to edit the first line

of each script to point to the location of the Perl library (on Zen this will be /usr/bin/perl) and, after you have uploaded the file, set the executable bit in file permissions.

Before you start, check if your web provider has already set up any script libraries. Using a script should simply be a matter of adding their sample code to your web pages.

A better approach might be to add a forum system, where users can leave comments on the sites and also post other discussions such as Community Announcements, Lost and Found, For Sale and so on. Zen provides a free forum system, which you can set up from your control panel (CPanel).